

LOWELL SUN - EDITORIAL:

Keep state treasurer in charge of marijuana

The Lowell Sun

UPDATED: 04/22/2017 07:00:33 AM EDT

For a body willing to let the voters of this state decide the fate of recreational pot, the Legislature now appears intent on tinkering with every detail of its rollout.

The latest intervention exercise involves a legislative power play that would replace the state treasurer as the designated overseer of the recreational marijuana industry with an independent commission, similar to the one that regulates casino gambling.

That appears to be the position of state Rep. Mark J. Cusack, House chairman of the committee overhauling the voter-passed pot law. He recently stated that such a panel might be the better option.

Of course, this doesn't sit well with Treasurer Deb Goldberg, who's been given the sole power to hire and fire the officials who will oversee this new industry. According to Goldberg, she's already dedicated considerable time and money to ensure recreational pot's profitability and safety.

We understood why lawmakers felt the need to review the unanticipated consequences of a law passed by referendum, but we question why they now feel the need to change its oversight structure.

These 11th-hour machinations make us wonder if lawmakers actually want a truly independent board of pot overseers. That independence is ostensibly what motivates lawmakers to unseat Goldberg.

Under the current law, a three-person Cannabis Control Commission -- appointed by the state treasurer -- exercises sole control over this fledgling industry.

Some legislators apparently believe that invests too much power in one elected official.

They'd prefer a panel modeled after the Gambling Commission, which consists of five members -- one appointed by the governor, one by the attorney general, one by the treasurer, and two by a combined vote of those three constitutional officers.

Perhaps a five-member panel might offer more diverse input, but we wouldn't to hold up the gaming commission as an example of the ideally run organization. It's had its share of missteps along the way, and critics -- including state Auditor Suzanne Bump -- who question how forthcoming it's been about its finances.

The treasurer's office has already established a high standard of transparency -- its Open Checkbook website provides details on the state's payroll -- that we're certain would continue under its added duties.

And no one seems concerned with the way the treasurer currently runs her office, which includes the Alcoholic Beverages Control Commission, the agency that controls the sale, purchase, transportation, manufacture and possession of alcoholic beverages.

Other states that have legalized recreational pot regulate it along the lines of Massachusetts' present setup.

In Colorado, which a delegation of our state senators visited to observe its growing pot industry, that state's Department of Revenue, which regulates gambling and alcohol, oversees marijuana. Washington state has a three-person Liquor and Cannabis Commission.

It seems these states and others came to the obvious conclusion that an agency with considerable experience in regulating one vice substance would be the logical place to oversee another.

This might be the only time we agree with Jim Borghesani, who spearheaded the recreational pot ballot effort. Lawmakers, leave the state treasurer in charge of pot.

Read more: http://www.lowellsun.com/opinion/ci_30939519/keep-state-treasurer-charge-marijuana#ixzz4fAusJnPz